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*Conservation, Community
and
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*The 1976 B. Y. Morrison
Memorial Lecture*

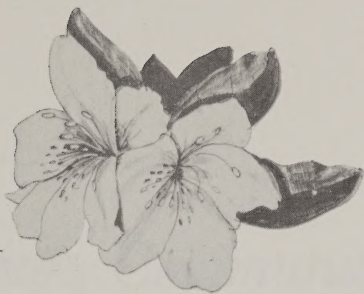
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The B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lectureship was established by the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to recognize outstanding accomplishments in the sciences and practice of ornamental horticulture and other environic sciences . . . to encourage their wider application to improve the quality of life . . . and to stress the urgency of preserving and enhancing natural beauty in man's surroundings.

Lecturers meeting these standards of achievement and capable of giving effective voice to vital environmental messages are chosen from nominations submitted to a formal selection panel established by the Department. Nominations are obtained from scientific societies and other professional associations, foundations, universities, and previous lecturers. Each platform is selected to provide a distinguished audience, and to promote an exchange of ideas among leaders working to improve our environment. The texts of these lectures frequently are reprinted in popular and professional publications.

B. Y. Morrison (1891 — 1966) was a many-faceted man—a scientist, landscape architect, administrator, plant explorer, author, and lecturer. A pioneer in ornamental horticulture, he was the first Director of the National Arboretum, today one of the world's great botanic research and education centers. He gave the American public dozens of new ornamental plants, including the well-known Glenn Dale azaleas. He did much to advance the science of botany in the United States.

Morrison's plant exploration trips to the Orient, Europe, and Latin America made him a nationally known authority on foreign plants. He was one of the first Department officials to encourage introduction of ornamentals. His popular publications were among the first to promote plants to enhance the beauty of the land.

*The 1976 B. Y. Morrison
Memorial Lecture*

Presented in Cooperation With
the National League of Cities
at their Annual Congress of Cities
in Miami, Florida
November 30, 1975

Conservation, Community and Personal Responsibility

*by William K. Reilly
The Conservation Foundation,
Washington, D.C.*

By arranging for this Bicentennial Morrison Lecture to be delivered before the Annual Congress of the National League of Cities, the Agricultural Research Service, long distinguished in the cause of natural conservation, creates a symbolic union appropriate to my theme. For an address on "Conservation, Community and Personal Responsibility" necessarily assumes a perspective that embraces both natural habitats and human communities. By adopting "urban conservation" as a theme for its policy deliberations, the National League of Cities suggests a new context for discussing urban affairs. Now, just half a year before "Habitat," the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements convenes in Vancouver, I am pleased and honored to take advantage of that context to shape my remarks.

As you convene today, the cities once again are said to be in crisis. Daily bulletins monitor the condition of New York while observers wonder in which cities the spectre of default may loom up next. New housing starts are low while the rate of abandonment of housing

in some cities is rising. The cost of everything from schools and teachers to asphalt and paint is at an all-time high and so, too, is the public's impatience with new bond initiatives and tax increases. Unemployment rates, chronically high in some central city urban neighborhoods, are half again larger than their average of recent years.

So the cities are in trouble in 1975. Nothing fundamentally new in that, is there? We have been hearing about an urban crisis for at least a decade.

But there have been at least three important changes since 1965.

First, in the past ten years we witnessed, in the Great Society, as large a diversion of Federal resources to urban programs as we are likely to see. In the opinion of many of our most thoughtful observers, it made things little better and perhaps made them even worse.

Second, the rising cost of resources has begun to have an impact upon Americans' budgets, ways of life, and ways of thinking. Americans paid little for foreign oil in 1965. By 1970, the average American family paid \$35 for imported supplies of oil; in post-OPEC 1975, the bill was \$350; and in 1980 every family will pay \$500 for foreign oil. And the bill for new domestic energy facilities and fuels will also soar, soaking up funds that might have gone to meet other needs.

Third, there has been an intensifying mistrust of governmental institutions. This mistrust has two dimensions. The enactment of new laws, the creation of new institutions, and the expenditure of vast amounts of funds to solve problems that persist, and, in some cases, like crime, even worsen, have made people doubt the *capacity* of government. Extravagant claims for governmental performance, excessively optimistic

prognoses by government leaders, opportunistic management of the economy for political gains, deceptive and illegal Federal actions, have made people doubt the *integrity* of government.

So, some important changes have taken place. We are on the whole more somber, less confident, more apprehensive about the future—less trusting of government to solve the critical problems of our collective life, our life in community. It is a time for reflection, stocktaking, reappraisal of our strengths and weaknesses. It is a time for sorting out functions between citizens and their government, and among the levels of government. It is a time for listening to people, both at home and in other nations, particularly to those people in other developed democracies struggling with urban problems like our own.

I cannot begin, in these remarks, to do more than sketch some elements which ought to figure in a new debate about the course of urban policies. I do want to make some observations on the cast of mind that Americans bring to a discussion of urban issues. I want to draw attention to the complexity of creating a national consensus about how to create more humane and attractive cities, and on the implications of this complexity for Federal and local policy. I want to allude to some encouraging evidence that cities present positive opportunities to live a good life, and that more and more people are coming to recognize these opportunities. And I want to say something about the ways in which other societies' urban officials respond to growing aspirations of urban residents for greater stability, community, and control of their lives and their neighborhoods.

Ways We Regard Our Cities

Our society sorely needs positive models of urban life. By tradition, we regard cities as places to get out of, and respond to depressing urban conditions by building and rebuilding at the urban fringe in dynamic but escapist waves of growth and development. About community itself, we are ambivalent, longing for roots, yet lamenting their loss while leaving them behind in the interest of individual self-realization, or "striking out" and "moving on."

The American people have the habit of thinking urban crises, not urban assets. "Urban crises" as a political strategy calls for emphasizing the most appalling, intractable, and enervating of problems. "Cities" and "urban crisis" connote for many people the rotting slums of our larger cities. Obscured or ignored by this formula are the attractive parts of those cities, not to mention all the other cities and towns which make up that seventy percent of America which is urban or metropolitan, those parts of America where the majority of the people choose to live. Like the leper ringing his bell, the urban spokesman crying "crisis" only scares people away; and this despite evidence that some Americans are increasingly willing to be persuaded that older neighborhoods in cities, which so desperately need them, can offer them a good life.

There is ample precedent for this focus on the ugly underside of American city life. Our slums challenge our sense of success as a society; urban poverty seems the more unacceptable and disturbing for being unavoidable in this affluent land. Throughout this century, there has been a compassionate literature warning about slums and the decay of community. From these

revelations came demands for measures to avert the most wretched conditions: to provide “decent,” “sanitary” housing; to adopt and enforce building codes that assure at least a shaft of light and air for every room; to implement and police housing codes to end the most egregious overcrowding.

Good Versus Tolerable

Unfortunately, all these necessary measures to achieve the “minimum,” the “decent,” the “adequate,” the “sanitary,” are *not* associated by many people with their own aspirations for the good life. It is other aspirations, be they for wilderness protection today or for the city beautiful several decades ago, that seem higher and that have the power to “stir men’s souls.” The Nation suffers from a kind of schizophrenia about human settlements: one approach seeks the good, the other seeks merely to eliminate the bad in favor of some tolerable level of dreariness.

This schizophrenia has a geographical expression within metropolitan America. Center city governments, responsive to large numbers of voters who lack adequate health care, food, and shelter, emphasize minimum levels of acceptability, quantitative standards of adequacy, or “quantity.” Many local governments, particularly in suburbs and smaller towns, can afford to give more attention to quality, reliable services, conservation of nature, and enhancement of the physical estate. Since local governments’ initiatives to improve quality of life are concentrated in limited portions of metropolitan areas, people with means to choose quality find themselves increasingly attracted away from those areas which emphasize quantity. As a result, disparities in metropolitan areas continue to grow.

In the words of Anthony Downs:

In the United States, it is illegal both to build brand-new, low-quality housing units and to allow older units to deteriorate into low-quality status. But the laws against these two types of substandard housing are not enforced to the same degree. Laws against new low-quality units are rigorously enforced in all urban areas. Therefore, only households in the upper half of the income distribution can afford to live in much of the urban periphery where new growth is concentrated. But laws against older low-quality housing are only moderately enforced in most older neighborhoods. They are almost totally ignored in areas where the most deteriorated units are found. This is not an evil conspiracy between local officials and landlords. Rather, it is a necessary recognition of the inability of many very poor households to pay for high-quality housing. No such recognition, however, is extended to the poor in newly-built areas. There, local officials zealously exclude the poor by enforcing high-quality housing standards to the letter.

This process creates a major spatial separation of households by income group in U.S. urban areas. The most affluent urban households live mainly around the suburban periphery; the poorest urban households are concentrated in the oldest inventory near the center; and middle-income groups live in between.

Popular attitudes reflect these disparities. The words "city" and "urban" have come to be associated with "problems" or "crisis," while "suburb" and "country" connote "assets" and the opportunity for quality. Some authorities like to blame this negative attitude toward cities on Thomas Jefferson, whose distrust for cities has no doubt influenced our own views. It is also popular to blame it on the automobile, which has contributed

to the obsolescence of many older neighborhoods. And much of it, of course, reflects the real disparities of income and race that are continually aggravated by the forces Downs describes. But that we culturally take a dim view of cities, and a more favorable view of country and even suburb, seems to be undeniable. To most Americans, God made the country, while Man and Original Sin must explain the growth of cities.

It is still too early to assess with confidence the many forces that came together to produce the legislative successes of the environmental movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. A few of the forces do seem clear from today's perspective, however, and these are worth thinking about in connection with the search for help with city problems. The environmental movement may offer a few insights useful to cities.

The vision of man living in harmony with nature inspires much environmental action. This perspective, derived from the life sciences, informs a strategy. When ecologists study living systems, they discover the dynamic natural attributes and processes which sustain diversity in a complex, interdependent community that is stable, and yet, at the same time, undergoing slow change. The problems that ecologists typically encounter are disturbances external to the system itself—disturbances which send shock waves through the harmonious built-in balancing mechanisms.

The Ecological Viewpoint

Ecologists are skeptical of man's capacity to intervene in these systems. Uncertain that they understand all the natural forces at work, they counsel moderation in change. In a natural ecosystem, every internal thing, inorganic or live, occupies a "niche." That is, it is an *asset* of the system. Resources represent not only a

heritage to be conserved and replenished, but also a potential for growth and evolution. This understanding forms the logic of environmentalists' thought and to some extent shapes the arguments they present to American society.

Out of this understanding have come not only warnings of impending environmental crisis, the analogs to the warnings of early 20th century urban reformers, but also the vision of harmony with nature. Fairfield Osborn, first president of The Conservation Foundation, issued his farsighted and prophetic statement, *Our Plundered Planet*, more than a quarter century ago. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* first made these ideas familiar to millions. The warnings continue today, of course, as they must in a time when technology and development impel the most sensible of men to ask what risks threaten our air, our oceans, our very lives.

However, the environmental movement has also held out positive opportunities for individuals to improve the "quality" of their own lives. Even as some supporters of environmental measures have focused altruistically on the long-term dangers to mankind, others have been caught up in the excitement of living the good life. And among many people who derive diminishing pleasure from consuming more goods, the good life means things like the opportunity to breathe pure air in a virgin forest or to swim or fish in unpolluted water—or at least to know that you could if you wanted to.

In fact, many of the programs established by environmental laws must, of course, be satisfied with compromises and numerical minimums. The effect of environmental action is thus often to permit some pollutant discharges—but preferably none that are dangerous or unhealthy. Instead of prohibiting the removal of forest cover, the rules may require adherence to grading practices that don't let too much sediment

into the rivers. Experienced environmentalists recognize the inevitability and the value of measures such as these. They see the need to reduce the adverse effects of pollution on health. They see the value of regrading or reforesting mountains gashed by strip mining.

But it is my opinion that the appeal, and much of the support for environmental measures, lies in their promise to protect streams that harbor trout, or to set aside untouched mountains and meadows as forever wild. So even while water pollution controls may be focused on achieving some quantified standards of harmlessness, the goal set is “zero discharge” or “swimmable water.” Unrealistic? Perhaps, in some locations. But stirring, commanding, image creating.

Example For Urban Leaders

Environmentalists support enthusiastically programs intended to prevent deterioration—“nondegradation strategies” they are called—of existing environmental qualities. Though they have been beset with formidable difficulties of conception and implementation, such approaches suggest the types of programs urban leaders might begin to attend to. They are important because they emphasize not minimum health and safety criteria, but the protection and nurturing of distinctive environmental assets. They provide the positive model that gives hope and meaning to the day-to-day business of protecting and improving the environment.

A sense of positive opportunities, exciting possibilities, and a stirring unspoiled vision has characterized environmental leadership, and helps explain its startling success in legislatures and in political contests. Wide familiarity with the attractive stretches of California coastline

explains the consensus in that State behind coastal zone conservation. Public campaigns for the protection of wetlands, beaches, and farms—in Massachusetts, Oregon, and Vermont, respectively—are all aimed first at familiarizing people through movies and meetings with the beauty and worth of their lands. The strength of such an “assets approach” surely is reflected in measures of general approbation among the public at large, and in acceptance by a majority of Americans of costly measures designed to protect or enhance environmental quality.

It is possible to think about human settlements in some of the same ways that environmentalists think about nature. The all-encompassing, ennobling vision is of community. It includes all of the environmentalists’ natural harmonies *plus* harmonies among people. It suggests a skepticism about massive change, a greater respect for what is, as well as what ought to be. This is in the best tradition of Utopia and the New Jerusalems.

There is also an urban analog for the environmentalists’ more compromised and pragmatic search for the good life in the here and now. There is ample precedent, in our own country and our own century, for focusing on urban quality. Although the definition of quality has changed from time to time and from place to place, the old “city beautiful” movement with its parks and parkways, is an example of the approach. Landscaping and urban vistas are others. Local conservation commissions and historic districts are present-day responses to the focus on quality. So, too, are the land-use regulations of many communities, as exemplified by design review, and by provisions awarding bonuses for plazas and for the construction of new theaters.

This emphasis on the positive aspects of urban life is, of course, not enough, any more than pollution control or wilderness preservation are sufficient for a quality environment. Urban poverty must continue to command

the concern and attention of urban policymakers. There is no sign whatever that the magnitude of poverty-related problems in cities has diminished: one study found that between 1970 and 1974, families with an annual aggregate income of \$25.7 billion migrated *into* central cities, while families with an aggregate income of \$55.3 billion migrated *out of* central cities. The net loss of annual aggregate income to center cities from migration neared \$30 billion. However, a search for positive opportunities and a concern for conserving urban assets ought to complement local measures aimed at alleviating poverty.

Toward Quality of Life

I have suggested that the environmental movement offers insights useful in thinking about cities. Many of the successes of that movement have come at the federal level where significant new laws dealing with environmental impact assessment, air and water quality, pesticides, ocean dumping, safe drinking water and coastal zone management are in effect, and where the string of legislative victories would be nearly perfect were it not for recent failures to achieve land-use policy and strip-mining laws.

And yet, we should be wary about regarding the effort to improve the environment as a success while concluding that the struggle to improve urban life has failed. An apparatus for environmental protection is in place; it is promising; but it cannot yet be said that our air and water are cleaner, our drinking water safer, the oceans purer, or the coastal zone better managed.

In fact, if the environmental movement follows the course of the movement to revitalize the cities, it will yet arrive at its period of disenchantment. Ten years hence, it is conceivable that we may regard 1964 to 1968 as a time of temporary national consensus on attempts to deal

with poverty, and 1969 to 1974 as a similarly brief period of agreement on means for dealing with perceived environmental threats. The years following each period of commitment might then seem to be the difficult time of realizing that consensus on means does not translate into unanimity about ends, that enacting a law that requires "best available control technology" and posits a goal of "swimmable" water everywhere is quite a different thing from enforcing that law once its full costs are known. Environmental laws and programs that now carry the look of winners may undergo a period of reassessment like the one that the poverty programs of the 1960's are now experiencing.

Tomorrow's Communities

Environmental advocates may then derive from a similar period of skepticism lessons surprisingly like those now surrounding our urban experience. Chief among them might be the realization that Federal action cannot really achieve much that is required. A second discovery may well be that the complex end of a better quality of life is not only a matter of deterring pollution or curbing abuses of nature, but also a matter of joining the debate about how best to create tomorrow's communities.

When the environmental movement began to turn its attention to land-use planning and regulation, a tendency to analogize from pollution control was evident: as clean air and pure water were the goals in pollution control, so the protection of unspoiled nature became the positive measure of success in land use. It is not so simple, however, to formulate objectives where the task is not simply to preserve, but also to create, to change, to build. We addressed this issue in *The Use of Land*, the report of the Rockefeller Task Force on Land Use and Urban Growth:

It is harder to create quality than to preserve it; for creation requires more choices and its goals are inherently complicated. In conservation, quality values are readily translated into physical ideals and in many cases, the ideals already exist—a community in harmony with its surroundings, a valley preserved in wilderness.

If the community or valley is instead to be transformed by development, there are no such convenient ideals. At what population level is there likely to be the greatest concern for the humanity of each inhabitant? Is it better that people live closer together or far apart? That they walk to work, drive, be carried by mass transit, or perhaps by elevator, within a futurist megastructure? How much social contact should we aim for among people of different temperaments, incomes, races, and ethnic backgrounds?

No consensus exists on these issues, and none is likely to be forthcoming soon. A consensus may someday arise, most likely from a better understanding of the natural constraints on development . . . and the innate needs of human beings and societies, but for the foreseeable future, the decisions that create and shape our communities and regions will continue to be made without ideal development patterns, social or physical.

And so the quest for quality in urban life must make peace with pluralism. The broadest possible diversity of individual choices and lifestyles must be accommodated. The building of a national consensus on controlling pollution makes possible the achievement of significant Federal laws, while the absence of a consensus on land-use objectives frustrates hopes for a national land-use policy law, even one confined to processes of decision-making, not the outcomes. Absent an overriding consensus regarding goals, then policies must accommodate many different goals.

It is tempting today, even after witnessing the failure of so many Federal initiatives, to look once again to the Federal Government to assume the critical role in formulating urban policy and fostering urban quality. It is commonly said that our urban problems are too large for the cities, that Federal action alone can deal with the dimensions of poverty, racial conflicts, rapid urban change and deteriorating services.

But flexible policy, plural goals, sensitivity to differing assessments of "the good life"—these hardly sound like a call for Federal action, and they aren't. That is why I believe that the direction to look for promising signs, for help in revitalizing cities is down, not up: to the level of the small community and neighborhood, not to the statehouse or to Washington.

Neighborhood Conservation

There is new and encouraging evidence that cities present positive opportunities to live the good life and that more and more people recognize these opportunities. Early in 1975, almost half of 260 cities surveyed by the Urban Land Institute reported indigenous, spontaneous activities directed to neighborhood conservation—housing rehabilitation, property improvements, home ownership, private market interest—in older, built-up central cities. Largely unaided by government, notable conservation activities are now underway in about three-fourths of the country's cities of more than 500,000 people.

This is not just the Georgetown [*Washington, D.C.*] and Back Bay [*Boston*] type of activity . . . restored elegance in laudable but limited sections often isolated from the city around them. What is happening now appears to be something quite different, and much broader. I do not mean to magnify its current impact, or to hold it up as

a solution to all our urban problems. But private activities aimed at improving long-neglected properties and neighborhoods in older cities deserve attention and support. Such efforts, however meager, measured against the magnitude of urban problems, merit the welcome and encouragement due any St. Bernard dog arriving in a blizzard. And though the absolute impact of private housing rehabilitation is not yet significant, the Urban Land Institute notes that the number of unaided units restored in its central city survey exceeded the total number of homes redone in seven years under the Federal Rehabilitation Loan Subsidy (Sec. 312) Program.

Community conservation efforts in built-up cities are to some extent a response to constraints on new building in outlying undeveloped areas. High mortgage interest rates, sewer connection moratoriums, slow- or no-growth policies, rising costs of new construction and of energy, are depressing new housing starts. The easing of some of these constraints will undoubtedly result in a new surge of growth in undeveloped areas and possibly some lessening of interest in urban conservation.

More positively, there appears to be a revival of interest in the old, a greater regard for existing assets than we have been used to in America. There is a growing sense of how to use these assets as focal points for neighborhood identity, pride, and community regeneration. We are seeing a release in personal energies and commitment to place that is unusual for middle-class people in our time. Census data show that we are slightly less migratory than we were in the past. The rise in the single-person household, the household of unaffiliated occupants, and the jobholding female, appear significant in some areas studied. New legal discouragements to redlining and requirements for lending by financial institutions in local neighborhoods may have considerable and long-term effects.

Urban Improvement Efforts

In September 1975, The Conservation Foundation, along with the New York City Landmarks Commission, New York State, and the National Endowment for the Arts, sponsored a conference in New York City on neighborhood conservation. Financial authorities, urban experts, and community leaders exchanged their local experiences. In-depth research conducted by The Conservation Foundation in Seattle, Cincinnati, Annapolis, and Boston, suggested to us that these new forces for improvement and conservation of the physical environment are practical expressions of people's desires for more diverse, stable, and cohesive communities. The efforts take many forms, as befits a movement that is largely shaped by residents whose starting point is: "What does this community have?"

Some of the answers are surprising. Seattle, one of our youngest cities, and one whose inhabitants display considerable concern with the natural outdoors, only recently realized it had a past worth keeping. This perspective has sparked handsome commercial renewal in the oldest section of the city, one that only a few years ago was eyed as a potential parking lot. Those on Skid Road [*the street that inspired the term Skid Row to denote a rundown district populated by the indigent*] who had inherited the area as it slid downward, are also being protected by special efforts that include sympathetic policies nurturing cheap hotels and missions and provision of social services. Change is being guided by a local board that reviews permits for renovation, with special attention to facades, signs, pedestrian activity, harmony of the turn-of-the-century architecture, and control of the automobile. The purpose is reuse by those already there, not restoration and, as the British say, "gentrification."

The land use envisioned for nearby Pike Place Market, atop the steep banks of Elliott Bay, was a series of high-rise luxury apartments and concrete parking garages. Through citizen initiative, the urban renewal plan for the area has been altered to stress rehabilitation. The physical site is being enhanced by the construction of a walkway down to the Bay, and special policies have been created for strengthening the market as a haven for low-income merchants as well as their middle-class customers. The market is doing more business than ever before, and private money—hesitantly—is moving into the neglected buildings. Residential communities all around Seattle have picked up this spirit, in Mayor Uhlman's words, of "adaptation and intelligent reuse of what we have."

Cincinnatians too are demonstrating a new interest in their neighborhoods. Recent trends point to a halt in 13 years of net migration to the suburbs, and to an upturn in the numbers of middle-class children attending schools in the regenerating neighborhoods. Among the reviving areas is Mount Adams, privately rehabilitated initially for a young professional group of renters, and now enlarging to include more homeowners, families, and older couples returning to the city. The thrust once again was directed toward enhancing and exploiting existing assets—charming old houses, an urban park, the planetarium, pleasant bars, summer theater—and easy access to downtown.

In Mount Auburn nearby, now largely black and poor rich with historical structures, neighborhood groups are using the community's distinctive past as the linchpin for a renewal that embraces poor residents as well as a newer middle-class group. Neither Mount Adams' nor Mount Auburn's regeneration was conceived by a bureaucrat.

Preserving The Historic

As Ada Louise Huxtable said recently, "We are beginning to see that it is only through the healthy functioning of the neighborhoods that cities function at all. Smallness, decentralization, units that can be comprehended, felt, and measured, and even loved, seem to be a last resource against the inefficiency, the corruption, the maladministration, and the demoralization of bureaucratic bigness so characteristic of our times."

New York City, despite its other troubles, has played an exemplary role in designing tools to conserve and revive itself as a city of neighborhoods. Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, for example, was—to anyone who thought of it at all—a dreary thoroughfare. To the casual eye today, it might still look that way. But underneath, residents say there is a spirit of positive transition.

The reasons are several: nearby are some fine historic preservation districts, where outstanding examples of 19th century brick and brownstone buildings are being lovingly renovated by affluent householders. New thought has identified the area's other positive assets: a stable working-class population that lives and shops nearby in one of the nation's healthiest downtown shopping areas; 45,000 college students and professors—more than Cambridge, a local spokesman says—who have not previously been served by local shopping and cultural activities; the ethnic enclave of Middle Eastern bakers and importers that supply the entire city with flat bread and olives. The energies of the vital and diverse community have been enlisted in the search for local corporate support. Special projects and funds have been raised to "turn Atlantic green" through a tree-planting program.

Growth and development on Atlantic Avenue, lined with handsome but neglected commercial buildings, is being guided by special district zoning whose goal is

“the unqualified preservation of the good, the consistent new development of the vacant, and the feasible restoration of the old.” Design review aims at maintaining the avenue’s low-scale 19th century harmony and preventing the proliferation of windowless warehouses and other buildings that deaden the sidewalk.

Slowly, the signs of a pleasant neighborhood are cropping up—bookstores, plant and craft stores, restaurants, coffee houses, bicycle repair shops, and toy stores. A flourishing antiques row is attracting people from all over the metropolitan area.

But this is not just a big-city phenomenon, or an East Coast phenomenon. In rural Maine, people are working out plans to reuse the vacant buildings in small towns for older people now isolated in the country. Norfolk, Virginia; Paterson, New Jersey; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Dayton, Ohio; Lowell, Massachusetts—the list could go on. In all, there are neighborhoods whose specialness is newly perceived by citizens. In them, conservation and harmonious change are being blended for the healthier functioning of the whole community. That is, by improving a center city neighborhood, opportunities are being created for those in it and near it.

There are tensions—between business interests and citizen groups, between the middle class and the poor, between the visions of rehabilitation and new redevelopment. But often there is also a sense of control, moderate change, involvement and participation in change.

Answers To Disruption

Institutions are behind the people in perceiving and adapting to new opportunities; their turning arcs are wider. Neighborhood conservation requires new

targeting and coordination among programs. It requires new thinking geared to "What makes this neighborhood function? What contributes to its decline?" It requires strategies so that the elderly, minorities, and lower-income workers also share in this rebirth. Whether they are homeowners who sell their old houses as property values go up, or tenants who cannot pay for rehabilitated housing, provision must be made for those whose lives are disrupted by change.

The various bureaucracies whose help is needed to nurture a neighborhood that shows promise of flourishing—education, sanitation, police, public works—have varied in their willingness to adapt to special and unique opportunities. In some cases, let's face it, the old national Model Cities debate is being replayed on the local level: "How can we justify selective preferences when all areas have pressing needs for public funds and attention?" I need not remind you that the political necessity to spread Federal Model Cities money over more than a hundred cities ensured that none of them could be truly "model."

This is a time of trial-and-error, experimentation, and also failure. I cannot report that conservation activities are underway in all cities. What is exciting is that many neighborhoods in many cities, despite all the constraints, feel they are on the way to better answers than they have had before. And governments on all levels, and private investors—individual and corporate—are beginning to respond by thinking differently, too. The current ferment over redlining and reconsideration of the traditional banking view of what constitutes a safe investment are terribly important to this effort, for a huge amount of private investment will be necessary to sustain urban conservation. That it is beginning to flow is one of the most hopeful portents for urban improvement.

The Victims of Change

In this time of uncertainty about our own directions, it is well to look at other societies' experiences. Throughout the developed world the emphasis is on urban conservation, "human" scale architecture, and public participation in the management of change. This universality of concerns and activities suggests the seriousness with which we should regard the phenomenon of community conservation in American cities.

For the past two years, I have directed an international comparative land use study in eight nations, under a grant primarily from the German Marshall Fund of the United States. I began the study with a sense that other nations have succeeded in creating more humane, attractive, and livable cities than we. I hoped to find out how and why. One discovery is that in London, Amsterdam, Munich, Paris, Sydney, and Tokyo, as in so many American cities, public officials and professionals have been busy during the post-World War II period constructing "a built environment" that ordinary people now perceive does not work. What many American observers had taken to be a superior tradition of urban management and conservation in European cities, upon closer inspection, looks in some cities to be a delayed accommodation of the automobile—with urban policies in the 1960's rapidly catching up with rising automobile ownership, just as American cities had during the 1950's.

Now, however, people in many nations have begun to respond to the policies and the processes that have altered their cities. Around the world urban residents are coming to view themselves as the victims—not the beneficiaries—of urban change, change that results in large and intrusive buildings and developments, change

that disrupts and uproots. And increasingly, people are uniting in opposition to the large, the planned, and the uniform in favor of retaining the old, the untidy, and the small. And even in countries like France, Germany, and Japan, with little tradition of public participation by noneconomic, nongovernmental interests, people are demanding and getting a larger say in what happens in their neighborhoods.

In Australia, the government foreclosed minimum public participation at a huge cost: citizen opposition has stymied redevelopment of The Rocks neighborhood adjacent to Sydney's spectacular new Opera House. When the city decided to capture the appreciated value of publicly-owned lands by razing the neighborhood to build a commerical complex, no one thought to clear plans with Nita McRae. This feisty and elderly woman, a fifth-generation Rocks resident, organized the Rocks Residents' Action Group and enlisted the support of union leaders in the building trades. Out of their collaboration came protest marches and demonstrations, headlines, and finally a union "green ban" which ultimately spread to other areas and tied up three *billion* dollars worth of construction projects. The ultimate results of The Rocks dispute are not yet known: Nita McRae recently permitted medium-density housing for low and middle income residents to be started. At very least, The Rocks has not yet been torn down; it may very well be restored to capitalize on its value as a tourist attraction; and Sydney was kept against its will from exacerbating an office space glut that now compares with New York City's.

Finding Reasonable Alternatives

A more favorable solution was effected in London. When the historic Covent Garden market was relocated, planners decided to raze the old market building and the surrounding hundred acres of old buildings to make way for a massive new office tower complex. The affected residents howled, and were joined by prominent planners, architects, heritage and amenity groups. As a result, the bash-and-build plan was shelved.

It is important to notice that many groups created to protest are moving from obstructing development toward proposing reasonable alternatives. Though there is still a stalemate in Sydney, the Rocks Residents' Action Group now receives official recognition, and is advocating a professional alternative "people's plan" sensitive to community needs, accommodating substantial preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings, and housing present residents in renewed small-scale homes. In Covent Garden, even greater progress is evident: with the help of sympathetic architects and other designers, a community plan calling for neighborhood renewal and recycling was drafted, and it now is the official planning document for the area.

Elsewhere, other innovative responses to the demand for participation are in evidence. In the Netherlands, harried planners now subsidize neighborhood centers, whose leaders carefully review and comment on redevelop-

ment plans. In Munich, officials present communities where redevelopment is contemplated with three plan alternatives in a referendum. (Critics suggest that the first alternative is usually to leave the community as is, but to neglect it; the second is to redevelop it somewhat; and the third is to tear it down. Not surprisingly, residents pick the second option, but they seem well satisfied with campaigning and voting as an equitable form of consultation and involvement.)

So fierce has been the hostility to big new developments in Japan that The Japan Development Bank decided in 1974 to make no further loans for construction in communities that did not themselves invest local public funds in the project.

And in France, the President of the Republic has responded to wide and vocal pressures and has reversed his predecessor's policy of attempting to adapt Paris to the automobile. He has canceled expressways, dropped a major new development in favor of a park, and discouraged high rises.

In the words of Colin Ward:

We are groping for a different political theory and for a different aesthetic theory. The missing political element is the politics of participation. The missing cultural element is the aesthetic of a variable, manipulable, malleable environment, an environment of "loose parts," [in which, according to Simon Nicholson who evolved the concept] "both the degree of inventiveness and creativity and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it."

In place of the environment designed, built, and imposed by elected officials and trained professionals, we are seeing indigenous proposals and counterproposals. In place of "long democracy"—whereby local elected officials could

count on making decisions more or less on their own and consulting the people in elections every two or four years—we now see “short democracy” in which urban residents expect to be consulted about most important decisions. The new era we have entered may be accepted or fought, but in my opinion, it should be embraced as a positive force, not only for conserving cities, but also for giving to people grown accustomed to a passive role of accepting, acquiescing, and consuming, an active part in creating, manipulating, and producing their own environment.

Writing nearly a century ago, Charles Peguy offered this warning:

A society which offers to the descendants of those who built our cathedrals no other function than, at best, to be their caretakers, should not be surprised if some of them, for sheer distraction, end by smashing the windows.

Creative Localism

The success of numerous local efforts on behalf of community conservation will require a toleration of variety and diversity and localism; thus, these efforts are at odds with powerful prevailing forces in contemporary America. Success will require acceptance of people's differing notions of what is worthy of protection and improvement. There is little doubt that neighborhood organizations will, if able, preserve and create remarkably different places to live.

Like any truly local program, the opportunity for success in community conservation brings with it a risk of failure. Measures that work in one place will not work in others. The resulting variety will not simply be one of architecture or of ethnic or age distribution of the people: there will also be variation in the residents' own perception of the quality of the neighborhoods where they live. Some people

will be moved to action on behalf of 18th century houses; others will organize to protect modern bungalows surrounded by chain link fences and statues.

How should we respond to this? First, we should recognize that the variety of neighborhood assets and objectives is matched by varied needs for assistance from outside the neighborhoods. The Back Bays and the Georgetown's may be able to handle their conservation efforts almost entirely through the market. Other areas may be able to thrive once artificial barriers, such as redlining, are removed. But neighborhood leaders in some locations are going to call for larger infusions of outside aid, from corporations and from governments at all levels. And they are going to have to receive that aid if they are to have a chance of success. The argument for neighborhood initiatives is not, therefore, an argument for all other institutions simply to stand aside and let natural processes occur.

Certainly, some of the most difficult practical problems that cities will be facing—indeed, are facing already—will involve the allocation of available resources to neighborhood efforts. Should funds be targeted in relatively few areas where they seem most likely to be effective, or should they be spread more equally among neighborhoods? Should some go even to those areas where neighborhood leadership has not yet arisen or is not yet organized to produce an effective result? What balance should be struck between the pressing social needs of the very poor and improvement of the physical environment—parks, sidewalks, and lighting—in neighborhoods undergoing private rehabilitation? And in what forms should aid be given?

A second needed response to variety of places is to assure that efforts to produce locally defined quality are not achieved by racially exclusionary means. Although the thrust of my remarks today is that small-scale neighborhood

organization presents an opportunity to build a quality environment, racial exclusion would be an unacceptable price to pay for it. State actions, statutes, and court decisions, are urgently needed to remove legal barriers that entirely exclude even moderate-income housing from some localities. Those least able to withstand dislocating changes cannot be forced to bear a disproportionate share of the cost of urban revitalization.

We must frankly acknowledge that our attitudes toward efforts to protect places are, quite properly, influenced by the perceived “threats” that seem to the residents to make protection necessary. Many of us are quite comfortable when a neighborhood organizes itself to prevent destruction by a superhighway (though certainly not highway departments). The same is true when the threat is replacement of an historic area by highrise office buildings.

Quite the reverse is true, and must remain true, when the “threat” comes from members of another ethnic or racial group who seek to make their homes in the community. There are times, of course, when the community’s own sense of place must be deliberately overridden in the interests of the larger society. This is true when the exclusive suburb decides to bar all moderate-income housing from its borders. It is equally true when an urban neighborhood organizes to defend itself, not against uprooting by urban renewal or an expressway, but against the members of unwanted racial or ethnic groups.

Finding the delicate balance of government powers is part of the mature sorting out of governmental responsibilities so important to policies for building quality communities. It is a sophisticated, difficult process, requiring us to move beyond simple notions—“let the feds do it,” or “that’s something for City Hall.” I recently heard residents of a reviving neighborhood in Boston discuss whether public funds should be spent insulating the heating

pipes in a public housing project so as to protect small children against burns, or whether the money should be spent to lay brick sidewalks and new attractive lighting in a gray area where such features would contribute to a positive upbeat look. The longer I listened to a quite sophisticated and compassionate discussion of the choices, the more persuaded I became that at no other level of decision-making would any better or more sensitive allocation of the funds be likely.

A third response—that the Federal Government assume the major responsibility for redistributive programs now improperly assigned to cities—is perhaps the most massive sorting out of jurisdictional responsibilities and functions of all. When we discuss pollution, we are aware of the obvious inter-jurisdictional spillovers: dirty air near a city fouls that of neighboring cities and the surrounding countryside. Why can we not see that if cities are required to set their own levels of assistance to the needy, that inter-jurisdictional problems will just as surely arise: those who must pay the bill will locate where the public burdens placed upon them weigh least heavily. It is one problem susceptible only to Federal solution.

The “New Yorks” of our nation—and there are many of them—are doomed to fail in attempting to fulfill the redistributive tasks assigned to them. As long as the cities remain the forums for conflicts over redistribution of wealth, cities will fail as agents of social change, and they will also fail to create quality communities in which people with a choice will live. If some foreign societies have had more success than we in managing their cities, it may be in part because expectations of redistribution are focused primarily on their national not their local governments; the national governments of most other developed nations provide for significantly larger proportions of their cities’ financial needs than the U.S. Federal Government does.

Listening To The People

However, neither the Federal Government nor the States can take the most important actions needed to create quality communities. If we are to evolve attitudes and institutions that will serve us in cities as our rural traditions of self-reliance and mutual help served agricultural America, it is to people at the neighborhood level and their local leaders that we must look.

The great need is to discard the intellectual blinders that cause us to forget the close ties between "place" programs and the aspirations of the people who live in those places. There is ample evidence that people, very clearly not of any "elite," are willing to organize and work to conserve the places where they live.

For good or ill, then, the search for quality leaves us just about where efforts to accommodate diversity and pluralism have always left us: focusing on processes of accommodation, lacking common standards for final products, listening to what people say they do not want as an imperfect guide to their wants and needs, encouraging them to build and create at that scale where consensus does exist—be it individual, family, or community.

It is time to experiment with new and more meaningful forms of neighborhood consultation and participation, to bring out local views, to draw people's attention to hard choices. Referenda on physical development alternatives are but one of the approaches tried abroad (in Germany) to enlist people's constructive energies in helping local governments make plans.

It is my impression that the needs of today call for a new candid leadership and a higher discourse when communicating with people. At a time when constraints are pressing upon the society in new and troublesome ways—of resource scarcity and cost, of environmental limits to traditional

growth patterns, and of capital—it may be necessary for more leaders to speak frankly about what are reasonable expectations of the American future. I suspect people are more aware of the complexity of problem-solving and more prepared to face real choices than even before.

Our task of local leadership in East and West, in developed and developing countries, lies in understanding and mediating between soaring public expectations. Citizens cannot enjoy the sense of participation and control over their lives that it brings, without addressing the problems that their unrealistically high and even contradictory expectations impose on their societies.. Government is expected to be efficient, prompt, responsive, and strong, in correcting for maldistribution of wealth, deterring sprawl, in protecting scenic coasts from pollution, in providing comfortable and efficient public transportation, and in thwarting intrusive or disfiguring highrises. At the same time, it had better consult with every affected interest, it must not interfere with the individual's right to drive an automobile, or to own a single-family dwelling, or perhaps even to build a resort cottage. You are left with a task of immense proportions, of finding institutions for apportioning resources to fulfill the important expectations in a way that most people will regard as equitable and fair.

Challenge To The Cities

Part of harmonizing demands within a system consists in lowering expectations, or redirecting them in ways which moderate the impact their fulfillment makes on the system's resources. Ours is a thinking species; our successful evolution now depends as much on psychic readjustment of expectations as on physical

adaptation. In self-renewing urban communities, we may find some help in forging new values that place greater emphasis on cooperation, community self-government, citizen participation, and personal involvement.

This is the challenge confronting cities in 1976; to nurture and encourage the sense of involvement and participation in urban life on the part of people who exhibit a pervasive and cynical disaffection from big government, big business, big and remote institutions of all sorts. This disaffection is leading many to turn inward, to tend to their own familiar environment. Their lives are enriched in the measure that they can be made more subject to their own decisions, their own choices. The default of most consequence to urban conservationists is the failure of American governments at all levels to create structures and processes adequate to the contemporary need for self-expression and self-determination in the management of change. Staving off this default requires leadership, not money.

Promoting Self-Reliance

But it is not so simple to alter our perspective, to change our "urban crisis" orientation and to reemphasize the assets and opportunities for a rewarding life in cities. It is an open question whether the country is willing to tolerate authentic localism, for it implies inequalities, differences, and accommodating other people's view of quality. It is particularly difficult to reorient policies to restore and enhance the assets of urban areas at a time when unemployment is high, an unprecedented 93 percent of public bond issues

have been struck down, budgets are being trimmed, and taxpayers everywhere are saying no more, enough.

Nevertheless, present hardships may make possible some changes that would be impossible in more affluent times. Scarcity far more than abundance calls for wide participation in determining what is to be done with diminished resources, if for no other reason than to assure that sacrifices are fairly apportioned. Listening more closely to people, consulting them more carefully, may enlist a greater participation in community life and help dissipate widespread cynicism and apathy. A new sorting out of functions among levels of government and between government and the private sector, long desirable, is more conceivable now than it was five years ago. And the discovery that many of the things we wish for our cities we must begin to do for ourselves—a discovery now being made in many American neighborhoods experiencing conservation activities—is conducive to self-reliance, personal responsibility, and greater cooperation. The result could just be stronger, more lively communities.



Mr. William Kane Reilly, the 1976 B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lecturer, is a lawyer, an administrator, and a land use planner. President of The Conservation Foundation, he is among the new breed of environmentalists who apply the expertise of several disciplines in solving ecological problems.

Born in Decatur, Illinois, Mr. Reilly received his law degree from Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., and his master's degree in urban planning from Columbia University, New York, N.Y.

Mr. Reilly became President of The Conservation Foundation, Washington, D.C., in 1973. The Foundation was established in 1948 and is a pioneer, nonprofit environmental research, information, and education organization. Prior to 1973, Mr. Reilly was executive director of the Task Force on Land Use and Urban Growth organized by the Citizen's Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality, a Presidential advisory group. The Task Force recommended several reforms in Federal, State, and local policies for protecting areas of environmental value and for accommodating urban development in an orderly way. Mr. Reilly was editor of the Task Force's final report, *The Use of Land: A Citizen's Policy Guide To Urban Growth*.

Before joining the Task Force, Mr. Reilly was senior staff member of the President's Council on Environmental Quality. In that capacity he worked on the early implementation of the environmental impact statement procedures required under the National Environmental Policy Act. His principal responsibilities were in the fields

of land use policy, urban growth issues, public lands policies, and historic preservation.

Mr. Reilly also served as associate director of the Urban Policy Center of Urban America, Inc.

This organization has since merged into what is now the National Urban Coalition.

As a land use planner, Mr. Reilly has studied community development in many parts of the world, and his philosophy reflects a constructive, forensic overview of the complex problems attendant to the future of our cities, to the new land developments that will become necessary, to expanding population pressures, and to urban-suburban growth management problems.

Previous Lecturers and Cosponsoring Organizations

- 1968 Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson; American Institute of Architects, Portland, Oregon, June 26.
- 1969 Prof. Patrick Horsbrugh, creator of the Graduate Program in Environic Studies, Notre Dame University; General Federation of Women's Clubs, Cleveland, Ohio, June 3.
- 1970 Dr. Arie J. Haagen-Smit, Chairman, President's Task Force on Air Pollution; American Society of Landscape Architects, Williamsburg, Virginia, April 28.
- 1971 Mr. Ian L. McHarg, Chairman of the Graduate Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania; The Thirty-sixth North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Portland, Oregon, March 10.
- 1972 Dr. Rene Dubos, Professor Emeritus of The Rockefeller University; American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C., December 29.
- 1973 Dr. John P. Mahlstedt, Professor of Horticulture, Iowa State University; 28th Congress of The American Horticultural Society, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 6.
- 1974 Ms. Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), President, The International Institute for Environmental Affairs; The Fortieth Annual National Planning Conference of The American Society of Planning Officials, Chicago, Illinois, May 12.
- 1975 Mr. Nash Castro, General Manager, Palisades Interstate Park Commission; The Centennial Celebration of the American Association of Nurserymen, Chicago, Illinois, July 21.

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